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ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa: implementation of resolution 49/234

Report of the Secretary-General

A. Introduction

1. By its resolution 47/188 of 22 December 1992, the General Assembly established an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa, with a view to finalizing such a convention by June 1994.

2. In resolution 49/234 of 23 December 1994, the General Assembly welcomed the adoption on 17 June 1994 of the Convention to Combat Desertification and decided that the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee should continue to function in order to prepare for the first session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, to facilitate the implementation of the provisions of resolution 5/1 of the Committee on urgent action for Africa, and to consider other relevant issues, including measures to ensure the implementation of the Convention and its regional annexes. The General Assembly further requested the Secretary-General to report to it, at its fiftieth session, on the implementation of the resolution.

3. The present report reviews recent developments and measures taken in implementation of resolution 49/234. It supplements the information already provided to the Assembly in the report of the Secretary-General under the corresponding agenda item at its forty-ninth session (A/49/477).

B. Status of the Convention

4. As of 8 September 1995, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, had been signed by 107 States and ratified by 6: Cape Verde, Ecuador, Egypt, Mexico, the Netherlands and Senegal.

5. At the seventh session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, in August 1995, many members indicated they had initiated the internal process for ratification, acceptance, approval or accession and expected that it would be completed in the coming months. On the basis of this information, it is expected that the 50 instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession required for the entry into force of the Convention could be obtained as soon as the first half of 1996. The Convention will enter into force on the ninetieth day after the date of deposit of the fiftieth such instrument. The first session of the Conference of the Parties will take place not later than one year after the date of entry into force of the Convention.

C. Implementation of resolution 49/234

1. The sixth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee

6. Consistent with General Assembly resolution 49/234, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee adopted, at its sixth session, held in New York in January 1995, a resolution on organization and programme of work for the interim period leading to the first session of the Conference of the Parties. Two working groups were established to carry out the preparatory work.

7. Working Group I is responsible for: (a) the initiation of measures relating to the identification of an organization to house the Global Mechanism to promote actions leading to the mobilization and channelling of substantial financial resources, including its operational modalities; (b) recommendations on the designation by the Conference of the Parties of a permanent secretariat and arrangements for its functioning; (c) financial rules; and (d) programme and budget.

8. Working Group II is responsible for: (a) the organization of scientific and technological cooperation, in particular the terms of reference of the Committee on Science and Technology, the establishment and maintenance of a roster of independent experts, and the terms of reference and modalities of work of any ad hoc panels that the Conference of the Parties may decide to appoint; (b) the rules of procedure of the Conference of the Parties; (c) procedures on questions of implementation; (d) procedures for conciliation and arbitration; and (e) procedures for communication of information for the review of implementation of the Convention and its institutional arrangements.

9. The Committee decided that the following questions would be examined in plenary: the facilitation of the implementation of the resolution on urgent action for Africa through the exchange of information and the review of progress made thereon and the promotion of action in other regions, the agenda for the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties, coordination with other conventions, cooperation with relevant bodies or agencies and public awareness activities.

10. The Committee also reviewed, at the sixth session, reports on measures taken to implement its resolution 5/1 on urgent action for Africa and interim action in other regions.

2. The seventh session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee

11. At its seventh session, held at Nairobi, from 7 to 17 August 1995, the Committee reviewed updated reports on measures taken to implement the resolution on urgent action for Africa and interim action in other regions. The discussion demonstrated that all signatories were taking active steps to promote interim action, as described briefly in section D. Many delegations expressed satisfaction with the efforts of the interim secretariat to facilitate urgent action for Africa and interim action in other regions. Members of the Committee and international organizations were encouraged to provide supplementary information at future sessions of the Committee.

12. In addition to discussions in plenary, the two working groups initiated the examination of questions relating to the preparation for the first session of the Conference of the Parties. The atmosphere was constructive throughout the discussions and progress was made on all issues under review. The working groups will continue their work at the eighth session on the basis of documentation reflecting the outcome of discussions, as well as analysis and suggestions, to be prepared by the interim secretariat.

3. Participation in the work of the Committee

13. Participation by States in the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee process remains high. A large majority of delegations have included representatives from their capitals. The participation of developing countries was facilitated by the contributions of Governments to the special voluntary fund set up for that purpose by General Assembly resolution 47/188, in paragraph 15. However, since their participation remains dependent on the availability of financial resources, there is concern that, should replenishment of the voluntary fund be insufficient, many countries affected by desertification might not be adequately represented in future sessions of the Committee.

14. Participation in the Committee by institutions of the United Nations system, other international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) remained active and constructive. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and its Office to Combat Desertification and Drought, the

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in particular, continued to support the process actively by making financial or human resources available to the Secretariat and/or by providing expertise and resources, both human and financial, in support of preparatory activities carried out in a number of affected developing countries.

15. A total of 304 NGOs have been granted accreditation with the Committee. Up to 32 of them attended the sixth and seventh sessions, a substantial majority originating from developing countries. NGOs have established an international network on desertification to support the implementation of the Convention (RIOD). The participation of NGOs in the work of the Committee is widely recognized as useful and effective. However, the degree of their participation remains dependent on the availability of financial assistance.

D. Activities in support of the resolution on urgent measures for Africa and interim action in other regions

16. Reports and discussions at the sixth and seventh sessions of the Committee demonstrated that all signatories of the Convention are taking active steps to promote interim action, with the support of competent international organizations. Members of the Committee are specifically committed to implementing the resolution on urgent action for Africa and are taking measures accordingly. The discussion also demonstrated that concrete action is being taken in other regions, underlining the global dimension of desertification and the readiness of countries to initiate response measures. A detailed compilation of information with respect to the implementation of the resolution on urgent action for Africa and action in other regions can be found in documents A/AC.241/40, A/AC.241/Misc.3 and A/AC.241/Misc.3/Add.1-25, as well as in the "Conclusions by the Chairman" contained in the report on the seventh session (document A/50/74/Add.1).

E. Future work

1. Sessions of the Intergovernmental Coordinating Committee

17. In the light of the amount of work required during the interim period, the Committee adopted resolution 7/1, in which, inter alia, it recommended to the General Assembly:

(a) That two sessions of the Committee be held in 1996, each of two weeks' duration: the eighth session in Geneva, from 5 to 16 February 1996, and the ninth session in New York, from 3 to 13 September 1996;

(b) That a further two sessions be authorized in 1997: the tenth to be held in New York from 6 to 17 January and the eleventh in April, the exact dates and venue to be decided at a later stage.

18. The Committee further requested the General Assembly to "review the financial situation of the Trust Fund and the Special Voluntary Fund in the light of the report to be submitted to its fiftieth session and to take appropriate decisions". The report will be submitted by the Chairman of the Committee.

2. Extrabudgetary funding

19. In that resolution, the Committee also appealed to Governments and other interested organizations to make early contributions to the Special Voluntary Fund in order to ensure the effective participation of developing countries in future sessions of the Committee. Timely replenishment has a direct bearing on the venue and on the substantive content of sessions.

3. Secretariat support

20. Provision was made in the current biennium, within existing United Nations budgetary resources, for the interim secretariat to continue to service Committee sessions and to facilitate the implementation of the resolution on urgent action for Africa and interim action in other regions. In addition, extrabudgetary funding is made available to the interim secretariat through the Trust Fund established in resolution 47/188 to support the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee process. Adequate replenishment of the Trust Fund is critical to the performance of secretariat functions and to the proper functioning of the Committee.